

Andrew Jackson to Thomas H. Benton, July 28, 1813, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO THOMAS H. BENTON, A FRAGMENT.¹

¹ This is only a fragment of a letter. It seems to be part of Jackson's reply to Benton's letter of July 25, and was probably written late in that month. The original is in the possession of Mrs. Rachael J. Lawrence.

Hermitage, July [28 or later] 1813

. . . . It is the character of the man of honor, and particularly of the *soldier* not to quarrel and brawl like the fish woman. I defy the world to say that if an injury or supposed injury had proceeded from my hand, that I was unwilling to repair it. If in an error (as all men are fallable) on *friendly* explanation I hasten to acknowledge it. But if driven by any of the wicked passions to the alternative of acknowledging a falsehood, doing a dishonorable act, or appealing to the last resort of men of honor, I never did, nor never *will* hesitate on the subject.

But in relation to the mode of fighting, which you so much complain, it is well known I acted as the friend of Major Carrol, and this your brother knew in every stage of this affair. When he challenged my friend according to the universal law of honor, my friend had the right to choose his mode, time and place of fighting, nor is it true either in fact or *honorable* presumption that my friend made this choice through my agency. It is presumable he knew the manner of fighting for which he was best qualified and would consequently make choice of it. It is the first time I ever heard a challenger complain of the manner his adversary had chosen to fight, or that he could not get round to meet his enemy. The

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range of the ball, the fire of the pistol at the same time, Major Carrol being wounded, all show he did get round, and I make no doubt your brother has informed you how and in what manner. It is true they stood back to back before the word was given, a mode not unusual and a precaution thought necessary to prevent firing before the word, as such accidents had happened. As to the distance, it is well known that it is as various as the different qualifications of the persons challenged. When I profess to be a man's friend I never abandon him, on trifling occasions, and much less in an affair of honor, when he thinks proper to pursue his own mode of fighting. Nay, I should account it my duty consecrated by the hallowed dictates of friendship to offer my friend all the advice in my power for preservation of his life consistent with the laws of honor and propriety. As it respects this particular affair under description, had Major Carrol left the distance to me after having heard and understood the qualifications of the two persons opposed to each other, I should have recommended him to have fought at a short distance. It was reported and acknowledged that your brother was a first rate marksman at the distance of ten paces. Major Carrol is as remarkably defective. Hence then the necessity of bringing them to a short distance to place them on an equality with each other. To the extent of my influence it certainly became my duty to see that he, my friend, should be on an equality with his antagonist. In no other way could this be done except reducing the distance that marksmen usually select, to something like the same number of feet that they would choose in paces.

Nothing was concealed from your brother that could with propriety have been made known to him. The whole transaction on our part was² our answer.

2 At this point in the manuscript the page comes to an end and a page seems to be missing.

on one or the other of two grounds and no other viz. that you are sensible of having done me injustice, or a demand of such satisfaction as one man of honor usually thinks he has a right to ask of another. This sir I have a right to expect from the Military Commission which

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you now possess. This sir comports with the magnanimity of a soldier, if in error to say, or promptly to demand of me satisfaction for any injury you may think I have done you.

I am yours, etc.